

# Drastic Changes Ahead In Suffolk's War On Drugs

Heroin and Opiate Advisory Panel report gives 48 recommendations to fill gaps, address issues of substance abuse.

- By [Sara Walsh](#)
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Jeffrey Reynolds, Suffolk Heroin and Opiate Advisory Panel chairman, speaks at a press conference announcing the release of the panel's 51-page report containing 48 recommendations to re-evaluate substance abuse programs and treatment.

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Suffolk Heroin and Opiate Advisory Panel is asking Suffolk County officials to re-evaluate the county's war on drugs, now a "crisis" situation.

The panel presented 48 recommendations aimed at improving the prevention, treatment, and recovery support for substance abuse to the Suffolk County legislature's Health and Human Services Committee Thursday afternoon.

"It is our belief that substance abuse is preventable, but requires all of us coming together, parents, schools, treatment providers. ... ," said Jeffrey Reynolds, chairman of the advisory panel and executive director of Long Island Council on Alcoholism & Drug Dependence.

The 12-member advisory panel, formed by the legislature on May 26, produced a 51-page report detailing gaps and issues surrounding drug abuse in Suffolk County based on six months of meetings, research and two public hearings.

"Heroin is what brought up the talk and heroin is what's gotten the attention. However, we recognize alcohol use, use of marijuana and other drugs factor heavily into addiction," Reynolds said.

One of the primary issues identified in prevention was a lack of drug education, from alcohol to misuse of prescription drugs at all levels of the community.

"A lot of physicians are not fully informed or aware of potential misuse of different types of medications. It's not just medical doctors but dentists who are making prescriptions for the same types of drugs," said Kristie Golden, representing South Oaks Hospital in Amityville.

In reaction, panel members suggested as recommendation No. 1 a public education campaign including public service announcements. Other suggestions mirrored existing programs, but creating a permanent medication drop-off, like those the county schedules periodically with the police precincts.

However other prevention suggestions are bound to stir controversy, as noted by Legis. Kate Browning WF-Shirley, mandatory drug-testing of high school athletes as part of their pre-season physicals.

Prevention was just the first step as the panel's vice chairman Jack Hoffmann, of Eastern Long Island Hospital, pointed to gaps in available treatment for addicts.

"When parents are in a crisis, parents want a place they can take and leave their child to get help while they get their families living in an organized fashion again for a period of time," Hoffman said.

All too often, these are detox clinics who are not designed to deal with drug abuse, Hoffman said, leading the panel to recommend increased inpatient and out-patient residential recovery programs.

However, the panel also wants Suffolk to take it one step further in recovery, by providing more atmospheres and methods to enable recovering addicts to stay sober.

Their reports recommends and advocates the establishment of recovery community centers, hosting 12-step programs and supports meetings for teens and their families, as well as a possible regional recovery school – a high school for addicts struggling to stay sober.

Reynolds said the panel has six months remaining, to shape these broad recommendations into specific action points, then support their enactment.

However, the total cost of enacting these suggestions in altering the County's war on drugs is unknown.

Panel members recognized the county's fiscal crisis, having just passed a polarizing budget, but said the cost was not a consideration.

"The money you invest in evidence-based prevention, money people spend on prevention is money well spent as it ultimately saves peoples' lives," Reynolds said.

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